True Preparedness

by

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By PRESIDENT CHARLES W. DABNEY

June 4, 1916

"Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Ephesians VI, 14, 15.

This is a part of Paul's exhortation to spiritual preparedness addressed to the Ephesians. He uses the terms descriptive of the equipment of the Roman soldier, the finest soldier in the world down to his time, and urges the warrior to put on the whole armour of God—the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation—and to take in his hand the sword of the spirit. It is thus an exhortation to proper equipment for a spiritual struggle, to preparedness for a great war with evil. In this central verse of the great charge, Paul gives the three great elements of moral courage, the qualities that enable the champion of the right to stand. They are truth which girds his loins, making him staunch; righteousness, which, like a breastplate, protects his heart and vital organs; and the gospel, religion, which, like shoes, gives his feet security and swiftness in the battle. These are the essential things needed by the true soldier; they constitute the chief elements of the preparedness of the warrior in the great battle for humanity. I ask you to consider these qualities with me at this time as supplying the only true preparedness for the battle of life upon which you are about to enter.

Preparedness is the theme of the hour. The newspapers and magazines discuss little else. We have pre-

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paredness processions and preparedness conventions; preparedness drills and preparedness camps. Most of us accept military preparedness as an unfortunate necessity in this stage of the world's development. No true citizen would neglect any measure for the security of the nation. I shall, therefore, not argue for military preparedness. But the application of the preparedness idea does not cease there. Caught by a new word, fascinated by a new phrase, men are preaching preparedness as a universal measure. Its advocates proceed enthusiastically to apply it to industry, to government, and to private life, as well as to plans for the defence of the nation. It is to be the remedy for every political and social evil, the method of promoting every economic and industrial interest. Attracted by the popular excitement, the reformers and agitators, the politicians and demagogues, the faddists and fakirs, are everywhere shouting for preparedness. The need of preparedness has come to be spoken of also by serious people as an axiom and an aphorism. Some would make it the criterion of every social program, the shibboleth of every political party. It is a dictum to which we must assent, or be outcasts; a creed we must accept, or be damned. At such a time it is well to think soberly of the whole subject.

Let us remember, first, that this excitement about military preparedness has a temporary cause. This cause is found in the two awful tragedies of the day—the great tragedy of the war in Europe and the smaller, but to us, nearer, tragedy of the utter breakdown of government in Mexico. The spectacle of so many armed men, equipped in such marvelous fashion to use such titanic forces in such desperate fighting, naturally arouses great emotional excitement concerning military matters. The storm of anarchy raging now for nearly five years in Mexico, which on several occasions has thrown its bloody waves upon our shores, also awakens our deep concern, and turns our thoughts to means of defence and restoration of order. This is all very natural; but such spectacles and such fears furnish no proper basis for an estimate of

our necessities and requirements. They should only be considered as object lessons of the general advisability of preparedness.

This propaganda in favor of preparedness has the fault of every propaganda. Its advocates are so excited that they have only a vague idea of the principle involved. The preparation of a nation is a long process. The military preparation of some of the nations of Europe now at war has required fifty years. To say, too, that their preparation was military is to state only a part of the truth. As a fact, their preparation has consisted chiefly in the training of their people and the development of their intellects and characters, which is the most important preparation.

In the next place, let us remember that the doctrine of preparedness is as old as history. The preparation of the earth through the ages and the preparation of plants and animals, period by period, is an essential part of the modern doctrine of evolution, but thousands of years before evolution was conceived of, men recognized the truth of preparedness in Nature and taught the law of preparation in government, industry, and commerce, as well as in war. Nature, history, and practical experience have, in fact, taught men through the ages the necessity of systematic preparation in all departments of life.

The course of Nature is one continuous process of preparation. Astronomy, geology, and biology all teach us that the material world was progressively prepared, just as history, philosophy, and religion teach us that the minds and souls of men have been prepared through the ages.

If we consider, first, the material world, and look up into the heavens through the telescope, we learn that out of chaos was prepared a cosmos, and out of nebulae, the planetary systems with their suns, moons, and worlds. If by the aid of chemistry we look down into the minute things of matter, we see that out of electrons are prepared formed atoms; out of atoms, molecules; out of molecules, crystals; out of crystals, mountain ranges. So physical

geology teaches us that each change on the surface of the earth was a preparation for another change, each period a step in the preparation of the earth for man. Mountain and plain, river and ocean, plants and animals, all were prepared by the Creator for the coming of man, the creature made in His image, who was to have dominion over them all. We see more clearly every year that the material world was prepared deliberately and with design and purpose to be the home of life, culminating in the life of mind and spirit. As the wise man said, three thousand years ago: "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath He prepared the heavens. By His knowledge the depths are broken up and the clouds drop down the dew."

So in the world of life. Each species of plant was a preparation for a more perfect one—the algae for the ferns, and the ferns for the flowering plants. Every new animal was a preparation for a higher one—fishes for reptiles, and reptiles for mammals. First the frost and water, then the bacteria and earth-worms, prepare the soil for the grass; the grass is food for the ox; and the ox is food for man. The seasons also sing of preparation for the coming life—winter for spring and its flowers, spring for summer and its harvests, and summer for autumn and its fruits. In all our plans we rely upon the orderly sequence of the days, the months, and the seasons—morning preparing for noon, noon for night, and each month for the next, the year round. The farmer relies upon Nature's help in preparing the soil and in supplying the rain. Wise husbandmen, like the squirrels, lay in their fruits for the coming winter; "like the ants, a people not strong, they prepare their meat in the summer."

Now, as it is in the cosmic orders, planetary systems, geologic periods, and genera of plants and animals, as it is with the seasons, so it is with each individual life, whether it be a bacterium, plant, animal, or man. Each has a special period of preparation, a time of incubation or a chrysalis stage, as well as a spring of growth and a summer of fruitage, before it yields the stage of life to its successor.

Of no living thing is this more true than of man. As all Nature labored to prepare the world for man, so his preparation for complete living has been the task of the ages. To make man worthy of his Maker is the final end of all natural things—the end of our society, institutions, and governments, as well as of our homes, schools, and churches. Philosophers tell us that as we go up the scale of life, whether it be bird, lower mammalian, or man, the period of infancy and preparation grows constantly longer and more important in its influence on the development of the species. The greater the brain and nervous system, the longer is the period of preparation. Preparation is the law of education.

History teaches the same lesson. Each age, each nation, has been a preparation for a better age and a greater nation. To His chosen people God said: "Behold, I send an angel before thee to keep thee in the way and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared." True to His promise, through all history the angel of the Lord has led His people into, first, one prepared land, then into another—first, into Palestine; then, into Greece; then, to Rome; then, into continental Europe; and now, to America. Throughout all ages the command has been: "Prepare ye the way of the people, cast up, cast up the highways, gather up the stones, lift up the standard for the people."

The solemn question for us today is: Whither shall the angel of the Lord lead His people next? It will surely be into a prepared land, into the land where men are ready to do the Lord's work. The great people of the future will inhabit the land best prepared to develop men. Will it be Europe, will it be the Orient, or will it be America? If science, biology, and history teach us anything, the great civilization of the future will develop in a prepared land among a prepared people. Whether Americans shall be that people will depend upon how they are prepared in body, mind, and soul.

This law of preparation governs the spiritual, as well as the material and industrial world. The minds and the

spirits of men are being prepared, as well as their bodies. Men were given a church and religion for the development of their spirits. As He made an earth for training their bodies, so God built a temple for training the souls of men. Through the ages His spiritual temple has been preparing. Abraham built his altar at Bethel. With the stone that was his pillow when he had the vision of the ladder into Heaven, Jacob built his house of the Lord. After the plans given by God in the Mount, Moses built the tabernacle in the wilderness. We read that "All the work of Solomon was prepared unto the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord and until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was perfected." And the prophet declared: "And it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be prepared in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow into it, and many people shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.' " So in due course of time John the Baptist came "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord," and Jesus taught that His Heaven was to be a prepared place for prepared men. "Come, ye blessed of My Father," He said, "and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

There has always been, in every age, a leading people in a specially prepared land. Assyria, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, all had their day of glory and service. Do we desire that our land may be this prepared land, the land of peace, the home of progress and the mother of the coming race? What, then, is our ideal for America? Are wealth and power our only ends? Shall we be satisfied with mere quiet and the chance to feed and multiply? Or have we a higher ideal? "Broad based upon her people's will" America has a higher destiny than to breed men and make them fat with ease. Theodore Parker has

given us the classical definition of the American idea. In 1850 he said: "This idea demands, as the proximate organization thereof, a democracy that is a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people; a government of the principles of eternal justice, the unchanging law of God. For shortness' sake, I will call it the idea of Freedom." This is the American idea, this is the purpose of our nation, the realization of freedom in a democracy, the embodiment of eternal justice in a government of the people. This government which our fathers left us it is our duty to preserve and develop. How then shall we, their descendants, do this? Can we do it merely by marshalling our industries and drilling our people as some propose? Can we by "scientific efficiency" save America and make her a moral power in the world? Preparedness is not merely the training of the people in "scientific efficiency," meaning thereby "mechanized efficiency." True national preparedness is something far different and much larger than engineering skill or industrial organization; it is socialized energy, it is the intelligence and character of a people organized for service. This kind of efficiency cannot be drilled into a people by autocratic authority. Social efficiency is a human, a spiritual quality.

Moreover, such a quality becomes a social force only through democratic agencies. A machine may be efficient in a certain sense, but it cannot be efficient in the sense that a human being is; for a machine cannot conform itself to conditions, but must, when not directed by a man, perform one process at all times and under all circumstances. Only a human being can direct himself, guiding his actions by a mind and a conscience. In the autocracy the people need no conscience, for the sovereign orders what shall be done. Only in a democracy, where men are free to use their own minds and consciences, can true social efficiency exist. In an autocracy the people cannot possess this socialized energy; they cannot be truly efficient. As Shelley says:

"Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches, and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame
A mechanized automaton."

How, then, can the democracy develop this true efficiency? Only by educating and training its individual members and giving them character, as well as intelligence. Where each individual is a part of the sovereign power, he must have not only intelligence, but conscience. The efficient democracy is embodied conscience and heart.

The paramount issue, then, that is brought home to us by this European war and by this anarchy in Mexico is not merely military preparation; it is the issue of the development, through the education and the moralization of the people, of a more perfect socialized energy. A state is only truly great in the moral qualities of its members, and moral qualities can only be developed by the mutual interaction of minds and hearts. The primary business of the state is not war, it is the making of men. Character and courage are the first characteristics of the prepared people. Even in war it is not the big gun that wins the battle, it is the man behind the gun; it is not even the high explosive that actuates the gun, it is the character of the man.

Ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class, consider your part in this preparedness program. I have said enough, I hope, to show you that you have much to do in the preparation of this nation, besides drilling soldiers, training nurses, or paying taxes for guns and munitions, warships and forts. It is by preparing yourselves that you can best prepare your country for the struggles ahead of her—by preparing yourselves in mind, heart, and conscience. Proud as we are of what you have done here, it is my duty to tell you that your preparation has only just begun. You will become coöperating citizens of a nation, which has to be prepared for the greatest tasks to which any people was ever called. And you can best prepare

this nation to meet these tasks by making yourselves noble men.

> "A people is but the attempt of many
> To rise to the completer life of one;
> And those who live as models for the mass
> Are singly of more value than they all."

That you have the ability to do your part we testify by putting our stamp upon you. We have tested you and we know you have talents; we have trained you and we know you have capacities; but your resources will be like crude coal in the mines, your powers like water running over the fall, if you do not use them. To be useful, the coal must be mined; to be productive, the water must be turned into the penstock and over the wheel.

You are now calling for a chance. If prepared, you shall have it. The opportunity to serve comes to every prepared man and woman, and when it comes it will call for all the talents and all the character you can muster. Prepare! Success is never accidental. There is no luck in the moral world. True success is always prepared.

I have tried to show you that education is not all, and efficiency is not enough; that there must be character back of your education and your efficiency. Man is something more than body and mind—he is a soul.

Tolstoi said: "It is necessary for man to have a soul." Why? Because there are many things which it is impossible to explain without a soul. One of these things is man's progress. In order to move forward the race has through all the centuries regularly had to sacrifice the body to the soul. In wars and martyrdoms, on the block and at the stake, man has given his body to make way for his spirit. The soul has been marching over the body through these thousands of years. Behind and above all human progress has stood the regnant soul. For this reason no other animal has progressed like man. Hogs today are just the same as the Gadarine swine which ran down the bluff of the Sea of Galilee. The horse is today

no nobler than he was when Alexander drove him to his chariot. But man is still pressing up the heights of progress, holding in his hand the lamp of liberty that lights the path to the home of the immortals.

It is also necessary for a nation to have a soul. Has America a soul? Our fathers made the great sacrifice that we might have souls, but are our souls progressing? What are we sacrificing for the souls of our children? Have we met the great issues of the last two years as we should have done? More than one nation has found its soul in these last terrible months. While their souls are marching on so grandly, some of us are wondering if Americans have not been selling their souls for Mammon. Have we not failed to take the moral leadership we should? Morally have we not lost our way?

Upon you, young men and women, will be the duty to lead this people back into the right way. Some of you will be called upon to sacrifice your bodies that the soul of this nation may go marching on. Are you ready, ready in spirit, as well as in mind and heart? I charge you, then, to prepare your souls, as well as your minds and hearts. The supremest preparedness is soul preparedness.

How shall you get this soul preparedness? Only by the pursuit of truth and righteousness. Then you must have an ideal of the truth, and a standard of righteousness; in other words, you must have a religion. Without religion neither man nor nation can make any progress in righteousness, justice, or brotherhood. Religion is the only safe foundation of personal and national life. This is true of all forms of national life, but it is above all true of the democracy. Our whole American system rests upon the moral judgment and right feeling of the people, and religion is the only means of cultivating moral judgment and right feeling. I sincerely believe that the only hope of the democracy is that the people shall believe in God and shall learn from Him to live righteously and to love their fellow men.

Because then you have a soul, it is necessary for you

to have a God. Not by hands, nor eyes, nor ears; not by mind, but by soul is it that man progresses. The soul of man has two great needs; it needs guidance and it needs power. First, the soul needs a teacher. A man without a God is like a ship without a pilot; it may float for a while, but it will not sail very far or carry anyone into the harbor. Man needs God for his ideal, his inspiring standard, for his ineffable and ineffaceable light. Human ideals are faulty and fail, they are uncertain lights, they flicker fitfully, burn down in their sockets, and go out. They lead him, like will-o'-the-wisps, into the swamp, and then go out in the darkness. But God is an eternal light, a shining, deathless, everlasting sun. The godless man is in the dark; he has lost his way; his conscience is befogged; he has no guide to duty. What then can a man do better than to give God his hand and pray: "Lead Thou me on, 'till night is flecked with day and day grows nightless."

The other need of the soul is for power, power to endure, to struggle, and to conquer. God is also man's power to be and to become. Temptations are ever present. He who yields to low motives and base desires has already lost the fight. One needs not only the guidance of a great ideal, but the lift of a strong hand. The most glorious deeds are accomplished when God and man strike hands to do. Then is wrought that which cheers the faint, lifts the fallen, and frees the fettered, rights wrong and crowns right.

St. Paul would teach us that the man whose light and strength is God can stand alone. He may be abused, villified, persecuted, but he will not flinch. He will regard duty as a finer thing than life, prefer death to dishonor, and stand face to face with grim terror, fighting on when all others have fled the field.

We are told that the noblest thing Pompeii has yielded to the explorer was that "figure of a Roman soldier, clad in complete armour, who, true to duty, true to the proud name of a soldier of Rome, full of the stern courage which had given that name its glory, stood to his post by the city

gate, erect and unflinching, until the hell that raged around him burned out the dauntless spirit it could not conquer." Such, doubtless, was the Roman soldier Paul had in mind. Magnificent example of the man now needed to withstand the volcanic eruptions of these times! Like that Roman soldier, may you stand, "having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

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